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James J. O'Hara, ed.,
Vergil Aeneid Book 8.

Focus Vergil *Aeneid* Commentaries.

Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2018. Pp. ix + 195. Paper
(ISBN 978-1-58510-880-0) \$17.95.

It is difficult to overstate the enormous influence and readership that the *Aeneid* has enjoyed across time and space. Yet from the beginning certain parts of the poem have had more readers than others: witness Ovid's assertion that the Dido episode was the *Aeneid's* most read section (*Tr.* 2.533-6). In many present-day Latin classrooms, Dido's reign of popularity persists. More generally, the first half of the *Aeneid* often gets the lion's share of the attention. If the current AP Latin curriculum and the numerous student commentaries on parts or all of the first half of the poem are any indication, many students barely make it out of the underworld of Book 6, if they even make it that far.

Into this situation comes James O'Hara's terrific commentary on *Aeneid* 8 for the Focus Vergil *Aeneid* Commentaries series (2008-). One of the many virtues of the series is that, when complete, its twelve single-book commentaries will provide new options across the entire epic for readers and instructors. These single-book commentaries will be complemented by a two-volume set on *Aeneid* 1-6 (2013) and *Aeneid* 7-12 (planned) aimed at advanced students, all available at reasonable list prices. O'Hara's is the first volume on the second half of the poem to reach publication. Like the other single-book commentaries in the series, it is intended "for use at the intermediate level of Latin or higher, though it may have something to offer to anyone" (vii). This is O'Hara's second contribution to the series, following his excellent commentary on Book 4 (2011). O'Hara's commentary on Book 8 is equally strong. As one would expect, L. M. Fratantuono and R. A. Smith's scholarly commentary on *Aeneid* 8 for Brill, likewise published in 2018, often offers more extensive analyses within its 812 pages. Yet O'Hara's slender volume also provides learned discussion and up-to-date references that will prove useful for students and specialists alike.

The commentary begins with a general introduction to Vergil and the *Aeneid* by series co-editor Randall Ganiban, whose plentiful footnotes point to a great deal

of fundamental Vergilian scholarship. As reviewers of other volumes in the series have observed, these references, as well as those throughout the commentary, largely ignore scholarship that is not in English; presumably this choice reflects that the series' primary audience is anglophone students. Next O'Hara offers an introduction to Book 8, advocating for it as the "most Roman book" and the book most concerned with history and with the city of Rome (12). His engaging essay summarizes Book 8, situates it in the context of the epic as a whole, and points to its major intertextual relationships, including with Homer, Apollonius of Rhodes, Ennius, and the early books of Livy. Two maps follow. The map of Rome on page 18 is nicely annotated, but it is on a topographical layer that unfortunately lacks definition and clarity. The text of *Aeneid* 8 is based with a few exceptions on F. A. Hirtzel's OCT (1900). In keeping with the rest of the series, the Latin text and commentary are presented on the same page. Appendices on "Vergil's Meter" and on "Stylistic Terms", a bibliography, and a vocabulary adapted from J. Tetlow's 1893 commentary on Book 8 follow.

The reader has a masterful companion to *Aeneid* 8 in O'Hara's notes, which build upon T. E. Page (1900). A representative example of O'Hara's expert guidance is his comment introducing verses 18-35, Aeneas' first appearance in Book 8, in which the hero suffers from doubt and sleeplessness. After a brief summary of the passage, O'Hara points to a variety of inter- and intratextual parallels: Dido in Book 4, Aeneas' hesitation before killing Turnus at the close of the *Aeneid*, Ariadne in Catullus 64, and Medea in Apollonius' *Argonautica* as well as possibly in Varro of Atax's translation of the latter work. In addition, he cites relevant discussions in R. O. A. M. Lyne's *Further Voices in Vergil's Aeneid* (1987) and J. Reed's *Virgil's Gaze* (2007), all in a brief paragraph. O'Hara's discussion of verses 18-35 is typical of how his style strikes the right balance by supporting students with summary and context, while also offering information useful for a variety of readers.

Balance is likewise an apt term for O'Hara's treatments of the most famous episodes in Book 8: Hercules and Cacus, Aeneas' tour of the future site of Rome, and the shield of Aeneas. For these sections O'Hara offers extended introductory notes, with the longest running nearly three pages, that point readers to literary and historical links and review various divergent scholarly interpretations without taking an explicit position. In these notes and throughout the commentary, O'Hara directs readers to a great deal of important scholarship published as recently as 2018. O'Hara's notes also reflect his own scholarly interests with their frequent discussion of etymologies, prophecies, and narrative inconsistencies. But the topics of the commentary are wide-ranging, as a reference to Harry Potter demonstrates (102).

Another feature that characterizes O'Hara's approach is his rather sparing use

of English translation in his notes. He instead often favors explaining the structure of Vergil's Latin. For example, in his note on Evander's description of the ruins of Cacus' cave at verses 190-2, O'Hara acknowledges that it is "challenging Latin" (46) before clearly laying out the construction of the sentence with limited English glosses. O'Hara's method contrasts with Page, who provides a translation of most of the passage. It also differs from K. MacLennan's 2017 commentary on *Aeneid* 8 for Bloomsbury Academic, likewise aimed at students, which gives a full translation of all three lines. Instructors who prefer their students to spend more time thinking with the Latin will likely find O'Hara's method quite attractive.

Although I have not yet had the opportunity to teach with O'Hara's commentary, I read verses 608-25, in which Venus brings Aeneas' armor, with a group of volunteer undergraduates. These students had all taken an *Aeneid* course in the past and were at least in their fifth semester of Latin. The students expressed appreciation for the running commentary format and found O'Hara's notes thorough without being overwhelming. They also responded to the dashes of humor, especially the comment on Venus' *amplexus* at 615: "Aeneas finally gets a hug." It is worth emphasizing that O'Hara's notes do not provide as much hand-holding as some commentaries aimed at intermediate students. In the preface O'Hara mentions that he taught drafts of the commentary in a fifth-semester course (ix). The fifth semester strikes me as the level at which this commentary would be perfect, although it certainly would also work in more advanced courses. In addition, I can see it succeeding in an earlier intermediate course, as long as the experiences and abilities of a given group of students is considered. Indeed, many high-achieving intermediate students will surely be inspired by O'Hara's erudite notes in a way that few student commentaries can achieve. In sum, O'Hara has produced an excellent commentary, one that not just students, but everyone interested in Vergil will find valuable.

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